

Small Island Visitor Attractions: A Development Process Framework

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Abstract

This article proposes a process framework for developing and managing visitor attractions (VA) in small island developing states with Trinidad and Tobago, a two-island state in the Caribbean, as the case study. An extensive literature review was conducted, supported by field observations, individual depth interviews, and small and large focus group meetings. The process framework identified four sets of processes: national policy formulation and legislation; inventory, classification, evaluation, and ranking of VA; general operations management involving project management activities; and site specific activities of development, operations, and maintenance. The value of the framework lies in the fact that no similar framework applicable to small islands was covered in the literature and validation was obtained from a panel of experts and a cross section of tourism stakeholders in Tobago.

Keywords

visitor attractions, tourism, tourism models, island tourism, destination management

Introduction

The purpose of this article is to devise a process framework as a guide to meet the challenge of successfully developing and managing visitor attractions (VA) in a small island developing state (SIDS) with special reference to Trinidad and Tobago (TT), a two-island Caribbean state. TT is a country comprising two small islands with Trinidad as the main island of 4,828 square kilometers (1,800 square miles) with a population of 1.3 million people, and Tobago significantly smaller at 300 square kilometers (160 square miles) in area with a population of 55,000 people. The economy of Trinidad is based on the drilling and production of crude oil and natural gas, whereas Tobago is tourism oriented. The economy of the country is based on the petroleum sector that accounted for an average of 42% of the gross domestic product (GDP) of the country over the period 2007 to 2011 as indicated by the Government of the Republic of TT (GORTT; 2011).

The argument presented in this article is that the small islands of the Caribbean cannot continue to rely on marketing efforts to sustain tourism based on natural resource assets such as beach and marine resources, but must embrace a more holistic approach that includes the identification and development of a broad range of attractions within an effective process framework. Such a properly developed and professionally managed portfolio of VA will add significant value to TT as a tourist destination and will strengthen the destination management system. One of the foremost researchers of VA, Swarbrooke (2002), indicated that attractions are generally

individual entities, separate sites, or small geographical areas. Destinations, however, are physically larger and comprise a series of attractions with relevant support services. Importantly, when attractions develop they evolve into destinations in themselves with services, such as hotels, restaurants, and shops, complementing the attraction activity (Swarbrooke, 2002). The justification for VA management, according to Swarbrooke, is the frequent conflict among different activities at sites which require a management system that reconciles the needs of users with the conservation imperative.

The rationale for pursuing this study is the declared strategy of the government of TT to use tourism as a major development pillar in the quest to diversify the economy away from heavy reliance on hydrocarbon resources as the main source of public revenue (Ministry of Planning and the Economy [MPE], 2011; Ministry of Tourism [MT], 2010; Neaves, 2012). This strategy will present a challenge because, based on the latest available data, visitor arrivals to TT declined from 461,051 in 2006 to 387,559 in 2010, reflecting the continuing impact of the global recession that

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commenced in 2008 (Tourism Development Company [TDC], 2011).

The study concept is that a major gap exists in the approach to tourism development in TT, which the creation and execution of marketing strategies will not fill. This gap was identified in the study as the absence of an explicit process that can be adopted by the relevant stakeholders for providing an acceptable tourism product. In this regard, the article suggests that the focus should be on developing an appropriate process framework that integrates the insights on tourism development obtained from the literature and examination of the various frameworks and models proposed, and primary research involving interviews with tourism practitioners, focus group meetings with key stakeholders, and consultation with an expert panel of academics and practitioners in the field of tourism.

The portfolio of VA in the small islands of the Caribbean usually comprises natural assets such as beaches, nature parks, historical/heritage sites, and festivals and events with limited man-made attractions. The traditional approach of tourism promotion is to focus on destination issues such as external advertising, attendance at fairs, and entertaining airline and tour operators. This approach contributes to the gap identified that results in a relative neglect of the condition and management of the existing portfolio of VA. The focus on VA is supported by the literature on tourism that asserts that VA are the core of any tourism industry but an under-researched area (Balkaran & Maharaj, 2013; Kušen, 2010; Leask, 2010; Swarbrooke, 2002). It is argued that VA form the basis of the tourism destination product but have not been given the attention deserved, and a consequence of this treatment is that potential VA are not of interest to tourism researchers and practitioners (Kušen, 2010).

There is a reasonably vast body of literature on the general subject of tourism and several journals address different aspects of the subject, but the focus tends to be on areas, such as destination marketing and management, ecotourism, sustainability, cultural/heritage tourism, and generalized development models, which were one-dimensional treating with a specific element or groups of elements of the tourism system (Brown & Cave, 2010). The specific area of VA is generally under-researched, and the review of the relevant literature was undertaken against this background.

In terms of the sequence followed in the article, the following sections are presented: a review of the relevant literature on island tourism, destination planning and management, and development models, frameworks, and systems to ensure the novelty of the study output; the case of TT as representative of a SIDS; method; results; discussion of the proposed VA process framework and operations management process structure; results verification; limitations of the study; and concluding remarks.

The main output of the study is the completion of a VA development process framework (FVA) that addresses the policy/legal superstructure, inventory and classification system,

evaluation and ranking system, and operations management requirements as these activities specifically relate to the development and management of VA. The framework adds to the body of research on VA which focused mainly on site-specific management requirements despite acknowledgment of the fragmented nature of the FVA sector (Leask, 2010). The FVA was validated by a review panel of Caribbean and international experts comprising academics and practitioners in the field of tourism. The FVA was refined based on feedback from the panel, and the final FVA was presented to a broad stakeholder group in Tobago where it gained acceptance. A significant benefit of the FVA is the ability for easy adaptation of the framework to the circumstances of other SIDS, especially in the Caribbean.

Literature Review

The literature review was restricted to the areas judged as most relevant to the study and included reviews of island tourism because the case relates to small islands in the Caribbean; destination management, competitiveness, and governance because this is where tourism promoters in SIDS traditionally concentrate their efforts often ignoring the vital role of VA in shaping a destination; and tourism development models, frameworks, and systems to check how existing models can inform the proposed model in this study and to confirm the originality of the proposed FVA.

The literature on island tourism is relevant because the subject of the study is two small islands and Henderson (2001) indicated that there was an increasing academic interest in the subject of island tourism. However, Moyle, Croy, and Weiler (2010) pointed out that interest was more focused on the Pacific and Greek islands while other researchers studied the cases of the off-shore islands of Singapore (Henderson, 2010) and the Marshall Islands (Collison & Spears, 2010). The definitive work on island tourism was a special issue reviewed by Brown and Cave (2010) who identified four themes: island tourism as a distinct field of study defined by the nature of place, people, and processes; island culture and heritage tourism products that are integrated with contemporary lifestyles and landscapes; marketing culture and heritage products linked to destination sustainability; and planning and management which are critical to island tourism sustainability. The themes highlighted by Brown and Cave are directly applicable to the SIDS of the Caribbean, and the process framework proposed in this article addresses these themes to the extent that they impinge on the central concern of heightening the role of VA in the overall tourism schema.

The literature on the small islands of the Caribbean is relatively sparse as confirmed by the work of Lu and Nepal (2009) who conducted a content analysis of the *Journal of Sustainable Tourism* for the 15-year period 1993 to 2007 and found that only 6% of tourism studies were done on the Latin American region to which TT belongs. Works of significance

were produced by a relatively small group of researchers (Carlsen, 1999; Harrison, Jayawardena, & Clayton, 2003; Jackman & Greenidge, 2010; Kenneth-Hensel, Sneath, & Hensel, 2010; Nicely & Palakurthi, 2012). Harrison et al. studied the challenges faced by tourism development in the SIDS of the Caribbean islands and identified critical concerns as exclusive nature of tourism facilities, undue influence of foreign investors, disconnect between policy and practice, narrow definition of tourism, lack of integrated tourism planning, need for resource management because of small size, lack of a common vision, and lack of visible intellectual leadership. Harrison et al. (2003) concluded that there was a need for education and research and particularly developing case studies of best practice in responsible tourism policy, planning, and development. However, Harrison et al. did not highlight the role of VA in the identification of the need for resource management and did not propose a model for addressing the issue.

Research was done on Jamaica (Kenneth-Hensel et al., 2010; Nicely & Palakurthi, 2012) and Barbados (Jackman & Greenidge, 2010) as leading Caribbean island tourist destinations. The Jamaican studies focused on the island's 10-year tourism master plan and a tourism options navigation model as a strategic development tool. The Barbados study was concerned with modeling tourism flows to the island. These studies were limited, in the case of Jamaica, to perceptions of managers to the plan and visitor spend, and the level of economic, social, cultural, and environmental impact. In the Barbados case, the main concern was measuring tourist arrivals to the island. Island economies that are based on tourism are vulnerable to the economic cycles, and according to Brown and Cave (2010), the "tourism-based economies of the Caribbean experience discontinuous investment, delayed marketing and construction" (p. 90). This observation by Brown and Cave cannot be disputed from the recent evidence of the impact of the 2008 recession that translated into declines in visitor arrivals to the Caribbean (World Travel and Tourism Council, 2014).

The analysis of the literature on island tourism revealed that VA do not feature significantly in the research considerations because the main attractions in islands are beaches and marine attractions which dominate the product portfolio of the Caribbean. The literature also confirmed that the top five subject areas studied were tourism impact, sustainability assessment, general development, visitor behavior and attitude, and planning (Lu & Nepal, 2009). This position is curious in view of the study of destination brand components by Balakrishnan, Nekhili, and Lewis (2011) who found that leisure tourists perceived destinations as important for "tourist attractions (28%); history, culture, and experience knowledge (26%); food, shopping, and entertainment (12%); climate (7%); and local people and relationships (10%)" (p. 17). The development framework proposed in this article goes beyond the narrow limitations of beach and marine attractions to include a broader range of attractions identified in the field research undertaken.

The research areas of destination management, competitiveness, and governance are a major focus in the literature with studies covering issues such as visitor numbers and expenditure, employment creation, and social impacts (Carlsen, 1999); management of the actual journey undertaken by a visitor from booking of visit to exit (Lane, 2007); the role of the destination management organization (DMO); Magaš, (2010); managing tourism experiences (Ritchie, Wing Sun Tung, & Ritchie, 2011, p. 427); management techniques for specific sites (Leask, 2010, p. 162); destination network management and strategic tourism planning (Ladeiras, Mota, & Costa, 2010; Meriläinen & Lemmetyinen, 2011); the structure of destination management, competitiveness, and governance (Baggio, Scott, & Cooper, 2010; d'Angella, De Carlo, & Sainaghi, 2010; Ritchie & Crouch, 2003); and a planning framework (Dredge, Ford, & Whitford, 2011).

Destination management according to Magaš (2010) is "the tourism activity which engages local interests within meaningful business cooperation with the offer holders, in order to form the destination product" (p. 1046). Magaš also argued that a tourism destination is a complex system and destination management comprises many sub-systems that are generally "decentralized and fragmented" and thus require "coordinated activity" (p. 1043). It is precisely an emphasis on the destination product as represented by VA which provides the justification for the framework developed in this article.

The oft-cited Ritchie and Crouch (2003) study is directly applicable to SIDS and contained insights that were used in formulating the framework presented in this article, although the work remains largely conceptual. The work of d'Angella et al. (2010), in developing governance archetypes, described the fragmented model as a characteristic of many destinations that lack a proper strategy at the destination level. The fragmented model described by d'Angella et al., accurately portrays the TT situation, where a high level of fragmentation provides further justification for the value of the framework proposed in this paper. The model most relevant to VA was a planning and management framework (Dredge et al., 2011) that outlined elements of sustainable development, good governance, inclusivity and ownership, rigorous planning, and effective marketing and promotion. This framework consolidated the key elements of the tourism system and, although tourism resources were included, the importance of VA was not highlighted.

Overall, the approaches to destination management, competitiveness, and governance presented in the literature were conceptual in their formulation, strategic in nature not operational in character, specific to certain sites but without the capacity for easy generalization of lessons, and did not emphasize the role of governmental agencies that usually occupy the position of the DMO in most SIDS. The general assumption that VA are properly managed because they are mainly privately owned does not hold with respect to SIDS where public sector agencies dominate, poor management is

the norm, and the development of VA is not a prominent pursuit (d'Angella et al., 2010). Thus, the major gap in the literature that this article aims to fill is the presentation of a development framework for VA that is flexible and appropriate to the physical and management resources of SIDS in the Caribbean. In a sense, the elements of a VA management framework constitute the hardware of the tourism complex, whereas the overall destination management inputs represent the software.

The tourism industry is often viewed as a complex business that motivated researchers to devise models, frameworks, or systems to deal with the complexity of tourism as a service activity (Anuar, Nazrin, Ahmad, Jusoh, & Hussain, 2012; Fernando & Long, 2012; Mattsson, Sundbo, & Fussing-Jensen, 2005; Vujičić, Đorđević, & Vujičić, 2010). The relevance of a discussion of tourism development models is based on the objective of the article to formulate a process framework applicable to TT as representative of the tourism requirements in SIDS. The models most relevant to VA were offered by Mattsson et al. (2005) who described an "attractor-based tourism innovation system"; Vujičić et al. (2010) who emphasized the competitive environment, tourism products, strategies, and policies; the community and public and private actors; and market segments; and Hughey et al. (2004), Kušen (2010), and Hassanien and Dale (2011) who studied systems for classifying attractions. Kušen concluded that an underdeveloped tourism area required a basic functional classification system of VA.

The models discussed in the literature did not present a complete example of what could be applicable in a SIDS such as TT, but were useful in tracking the state of knowledge in the area covered in this article. The classification systems suggested in the literature require significant adaptation and were generally limited in their application to small islands. The proposed FVA represents a distillation of what was relevant from the literature, the particular insights gained from the models and systems reviewed, and the creation of a unique framework that can be applied in most small island tourism development planning strategies. The adoption of a VA process framework is distinct from a destination management model in that the latter deals with the entire tourism industry from promotions, booking of flights, accommodation, tour operators, and tourist services. VA are the major components of a tourism product portfolio that tends to be left to autonomous development particularly in TT.

The Case of TT

The development and management of the tourism product has never been approached in a systematic manner in TT as evidenced by official neglect (Trinidad and Tobago Chamber of Industry and Commerce [T&T Chamber], 2013). In fact, the only significant publications that address tourism include a master plan that was published in the 1990s (The ARA

Consulting Group Inc., 1995), a strategic tourism development plan (Tourism Technical Secretariat [TTS], 2004), and a national tourism policy statement (MT, 2010). The ARA report was the most significant study of tourism development undertaken in TT, and it recommended a diverse mix of resort tourism, ecotourism, specialty segments such as diving, cruise tourism, yachting, events and festivals, and entertainment and culture. Tobago was seen as strong in diving with potential for ecotourism in a tranquil setting with a product mix that included a national park system, marine areas and reefs, hotel/resort areas, historic and garden attractions, entertainment experiences, scenic tours and ecotourism activities, and natural, cultural, heritage, and event sites and attractions. Apart from the existing natural attractions, the recommendations remain unfulfilled. The portfolio of VA in TT include pristine beaches with unpolluted waters; ecotourism attractions, such as coral reefs, rain forests, swamps, and leather-back turtle nesting; industrial tourism sites of oil and gas production and petrochemical estates; a natural pitch lake; historical and heritage buildings from the Spanish and British colonial era; and festivals and events, including the major carnival parade in the region. A map of VA locations in TT is shown in Figure 1.

The TTS (2004) emphasized sustainable tourism to be achieved by focusing on high value added tourism, ensuring environmental sensitivity, establishing ongoing asset management, recognizing the need for authenticity, developing an effective institutional structure, conducting proactive marketing, and sustaining investment in human resource development. The implementation record of these objectives was poor as revealed by the key indicator of the travel and tourism competitiveness index (TTCI). Blanke and Chiesa (2011) ranked TT in position 84 in 2009 of 125 countries with an improved position of 79 in 2011, which placed TT in position 16 overall in the Americas. The TTCI comprises 15 elements grouped under three main sub-indexes: regulatory framework, business environment and infrastructure, and human, cultural, and natural resources. However, the development and management of VA is excluded from consideration in the TTCI.

The most recent efforts to address the aspect of tourism policy are contained in reports by MT (2010) and the MPE (2011). The MT proposed the development of an overarching national policy framework for sustainable development of TT and a viable tourism sector based on strong public/private sector partnerships, inclusion and support of the national community, emphasis on the rich plurality and cultural diversity of the people, and strategic application of modern information communication technology platforms to ensure efficiency and cost-effectiveness.

Tobago is considered the tourism island of the two-island state of TT and the only recent published study of Tobago's tourism sector focused on a quantitative analysis and model of the sector (Kairi Consultants Limited, 2012). Kairi

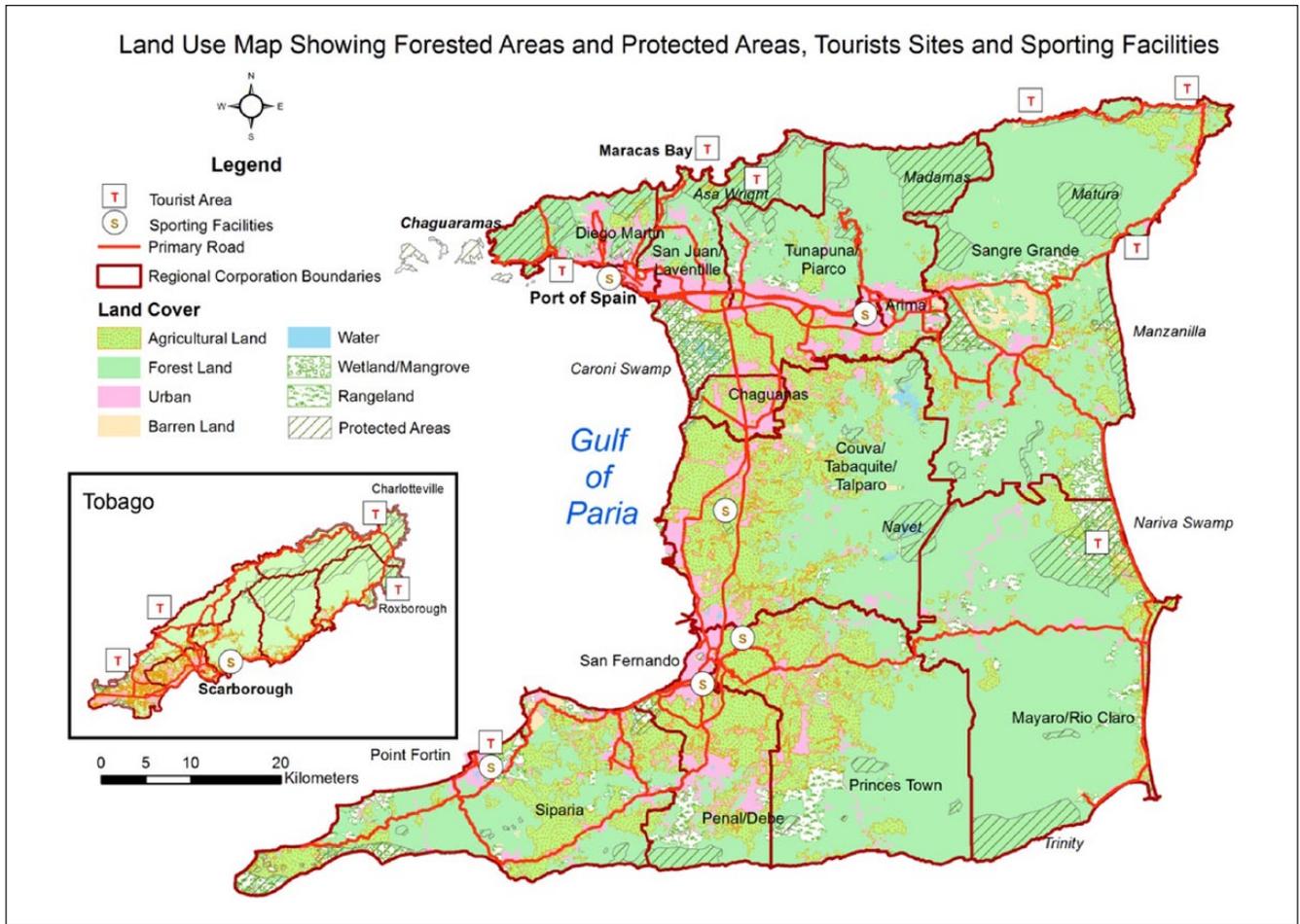


Figure 1. Map of location of visitor attractions in Trinidad and Tobago.

utilized data from interviews with stakeholders and statistics generated by the tourism satellite accounts (TSA). Data limitations narrowed Kairi’s analysis to the accommodation sector of the tourism product portfolio, but due recognition was given to VA, transport, travel organization, and destination organization as important components of the tourism system. With this recognition, Kairi identified the specific tourism assets of Tobago as marine reefs, rain forests and other natural phenomena, cultural artifacts and monuments, music and art, and a variety of festivals. The latter elements can be categorized as eco-cultural tourism which Pociovalişteanu and Niculescu (2010) argue can be a viable development option for communities with a low resource base but with rich cultural heritage and natural landscapes.

In general, the potential of VA becoming the core of the tourism offerings in both Trinidad and Tobago has not fully captured the imagination of the policy and planning officials. This position is confirmed by the T&T Chamber (2013) observation that “the majority of these beautiful buildings and sites have been neglected through an ignorance of their importance as historical landmarks and the basis of our cultural identity.”

Method

The study of VA in TT used a social constructivist worldview in that the search delves into the complexity of views relying on the participants’ views of the issue using open-ended questions. The study more specifically adopted qualitative research methods geared to producing results that permit the introduction of a new development and management system for which precise measurements are not possible. The qualitative method represents a distillation of the dominant ontological and epistemological themes which convey that knowledge is socially constructed and understood through collection of data from multiple sources (Carter, 1999b; Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2009).

The relevance of qualitative research is that it draws data from people (individuals or groups); organizations; texts; settings and environments; objects, artifacts, and media products; and events and happenings. Furthermore, the researcher was immersed in the area of study by interacting with people and things to provide depth and detail. The sampling method used was non-probability purposive sampling with the sample sites drawn from the database of the TDC,

the major DMO. Interview and focus group participants were selected as those judged to be the main individuals, private organizations, governmental agencies, and stakeholders in the tourism industry. The VA selected for an observation study were those ranked by the TDC as the most popular among local and foreign visitors. The criteria were based on the special characteristics, and economic and historical significance of the VA which accords with the approach by Daengbuppha, Hemmington, and Wilkes (2006).

The data collection process observed the following strategies peculiar to a qualitative research design: explicit clarification of researcher bias; triangulation of data by examination of evidence collected through document analysis, site observations, individual depth interviews, and focus group interviews, and establishing the themes that emerged based on convergence of the different data sources; repeat site visits for observation of physical conditions; use of thick, rich description to convey the findings, thus providing several perspectives about the themes; and peer debriefing by having the study reviewed by an eminent professor and researcher.

The actual collection of data utilized four traditional qualitative research techniques that included a field observation study of 40 sites (Trinidad, 22 and Tobago, 18), individual face-to-face depth interviews with 25 persons, a large focus group of 30 persons, and a small focus group of 7 persons. The observation study involved visits to selected sites and attractions with the objective of assessing and determining the current state of physical development of the respective sites in terms of access, visitor facilities, security, parking, and so on; the potential for future development in relation to the site characteristics; current management practices, including marketing, in the context of the experience and knowledge of international best practices regarding visitor reception, satisfaction, and general acceptability; issues of ownership and marketing; and the capacity to incorporate a mix of attractions in any one site or cluster of sites. The site visits resulted in the comprehensive documentation of the physical condition of and the management arrangements for VA which confirmed that the gap in the professional management of VA was real.

The face-to-face interviews were conducted using a discussion guide to facilitate open discussion during the depth interviews. The guide was developed based on the insights gleaned from the literature review and the observation study of the VA and covered the following issues: development matters relating to quality standards, carrying capacity, and infrastructure problems; management issues relating to practices, the tourism system, and site organization; operations management such as security, signage, waste disposal, restaurants, and parking; ownership of facilities; marketing strategy; and funding arrangements. The guide was provided to the participants as a means of preparation that provided interview flexibility to be able to capture emergent issues (Carter, 1999a, 1999b).

The large focus group was conducted in Trinidad whereas the small focus group met in Tobago, and in both cases, the interview discussion guide was used to obtain the views of the stakeholders on the key issues stated in the guide.

The data analysis process followed the steps recommended by Creswell (2009) in which the individual activities were interactive and interrelated and comprised organizing and preparing the data for analysis by gathering transcriptions of field, interview, and focus group notes; reading through all notes and related information to distill the sense and meanings from the data; coding the data based on the pre-assigned themes identified in the discussion guide and adding any new themes or participants' meanings that emerged from the interactions; describing the themes using a rich narrative; and interpreting the lessons learnt to inform the result.

Results

The overwhelming result from the data collection and analysis was that the modern tourists who visited TT were less interested in beach tourism and more excited by the ecotourism and heritage attractions. However, it was acknowledged that the vast majority of attractions, although capable of significant value to visitors because of their uniqueness, did not encourage customers because of their condition. In this context, the major finding of the study was that an observable deficiency exists in the overall structure for developing and managing the relatively wide range of existing VA, and the distinct need was the formulation of a process framework within which the development and management components can be rationalized, systematized, and operationalized. The key areas of deficiency were stated as follows: the absence of a consistent policy toward the development of VA bordering on neglect of VA as integral to the tourism product, unavailability of a comprehensive database of VA and a system for classifying the various attractions, the absence of a method for evaluating VA so as to rank them in importance, and the lack of coherent operations management arrangements that detail the critical system requirements such as project management, development activities, daily operations, and general maintenance.

The field visits to the 40 VA established that, for small islands, a diverse complex of attractions existed, including natural attraction of beaches, rivers, river gorges, waterfalls, rain forests, and marine reefs; cultural/heritage attractions comprising colonial buildings from the French, Spanish, and British eras, indigenous music and dance, local literature, films, and plays, and heritage festivals; man-made attractions such as museums; and performing arts centers, sporting arenas, and universities' campuses. The observations of VA found that considerable improvements were needed in terms of access, visitor facilities, security, parking, and related services. The conclusion from the observations of sites was that

the management of VA was deficient in most cases with a few exceptions in Tobago.

This conclusion was consistent with the position of Tourism Intelligence International (TII; 2003) which, based on a tourism inventory study, found that the responsibility for development of VA in Trinidad was shared by agencies with no single point of reference for ensuring compliance with rules and implementation of standards. The case of Tobago was different in that VA development and management resided with the Tobago House of Assembly (THA) which resulted in a higher level of management of the tourism product in that island. TII also pointed to severe weaknesses in facilities and services and suggested the adoption of an innovative approach with regard to the design, construction, implementation, maintenance, and upkeep of VA facilities, including a community management approach particularly at the strategic tourism product development stage.

The findings from the depth interviews and focus group meetings in Trinidad highlighted the relatively poor quality of infrastructure inclusive of site access, availability of utilities, and waste disposal. The general response was that greater attention needed to be paid to the infrastructure development of existing sites and recognition of potential attractions, including privately owned sites. The matter of carrying capacity was also of concern to many users and stakeholders, with a call for setting limits to the number of visits to some areas. It was suggested that other development models should be studied and a VA development plan be prepared. A critical finding was that vast improvement was needed in the management of VA if international standards were to be achieved. The application of appropriate management techniques, such as the creation of a management structure, the construction of interpretative centers, and training of staff, were considered indispensable. The management deficiencies were reflected in the poor state of maintenance of the majority of facilities at VA locations.

In the specific case of Tobago, both the stakeholders who were interviewed, and the participants in the small focus group commented that the management of VA was uncoordinated and there was uncertainty about roles and responsibilities of agencies. Furthermore, it was suggested that an organization be created to manage and promote all VA in both islands on a collaborative basis. In respect of managing protected areas, a parks authority was recommended to oversee park management for protected areas, with participatory management from key stakeholders and involving the local communities. Regarding facility management, it was felt that partnering among the organizations involved in tourism was a superior approach to individual efforts. At the operations management level, there was need to provide for proper disposal of waste, control of vending, prevention of sexual harassment, and contracting local communities to maintain facilities. The findings are consistent with the view that "those entrusted with the oversight of our heritage assets lack this basic understanding of their great value and do not pos-

sess the vision to tap into their tremendous economic potential" (T&T Chamber, 2013).

Discussion

Proposed VA Process Framework

Based on the research carried out and the key findings, this article proposes a FVA that integrates the various processes of the complex tourism system as described by Hughey et al. (2004), and which is applicable to a SIDS such as TT. The design of the FVA emerged from the expressed views of the key stakeholders who participated in the study. Destination management activities in TT concentrates on getting the visitor to the country while implementation of the FVA will strengthen the general management system by focusing on the value-adding component of VA, thus promoting repeat customers. The FVA detailed in this article represents an addition to the knowledge on models for developing and managing VA in SIDS because the existing models do not address small islands where governments are the prime movers and financiers of tourism-related development. In this way, the model proposed is more akin to an integrated collaborative system that acknowledges public and private inputs, rather than a destination management model that is driven by a DMO.

The FVA is outlined as a process model (Figure 1) that integrates four levels of activity to fashion the development framework: national policy level, VA identification level, general management level, and individual VA level. At the national policy level, the requirement is for the creation of a policy and legal superstructure to guide the VA development process. The requirement for a policy framework was reinforced by Henderson (2010), who suggested that due regard be given to legal and regulatory frameworks, and Vujičić et al. (2010), who identified a significant role for governments in the "planning, creation, and design of the policy, managing infrastructural systems, creating and enforcing regulations, developing of standards, and monitoring" (p. 1363). The review of the policy and legal regulatory environment in TT indicated the absence of a coherent guide with little acknowledgment of the critical role of VA in the tourism package (MPE, 2011; TTS, 2004).

At the VA identification level, the key activities involve completing an inventory of all VA and devising a relevant classification system (Figure 1). The focus group interviews pointed to the need to clarify the definition of attractions which is an issue faced in the research literature (Hughey et al., 2004; Kan, Wang, & Yan, 2009; Swarbrooke, 2002). The VA industry is very complex, and this complexity is exacerbated by the difficulty in arriving at precise definitions of attractions. Based on a distillation of the research on the issue, this study arrived at a definition of an attraction, appropriate to small islands, as

a site or facility that receives over 1,500 visitors per year, whether local or foreign, and has an identified management structure.

In seeking to develop a schema for classifying VA, this study utilized the work of Kušen (2010), Marr (2011), Hassanien and Dale (2011), Swarbrooke (2002), and Inskeep (1991). The most comprehensive categorization of VA was undertaken by Kušen who identified 16 attractions and completed a functional classification of these attractions to which was linked 16 key data characteristics applied to each attraction type represented as a 3D figure. The FVA proposes a simpler classification according to three broad categories of attractions: natural, comprising coastal and marine, environmental and landscape, and parks and protected areas; cultural, made up of historical and heritage, traditional, and events; and man-made, including business facilities and conferences, entertainment, and sporting facilities and events.

Natural resource attractions typically cover attractions that occur naturally in the environment and encompass coastal and marine resources, landscape features and environmental assets, and parks and protected areas. Cultural attractions span the historical and heritage assets of a community including: traditions; aesthetics; values and customs; craft, music, arts, dance or drama; rituals and tribal customs; festivals, interpretive centers, foods, and special events. Man-made attractions cover a range of activities, including business facilities and events, entertainment, and sporting facilities and events.

There are attractions that do not fit neatly into any single category and include recreational and entertainment attractions. Recreational attractions provide either active or passive outdoor recreational activities directly dependent upon the natural or man-made elements of the landscape, or activities such as touring, hiking, scuba diving, and golf. Entertainment attractions provide visitors with an experience that typically involves amusement, pleasure, fun, and/or excitement. These attractions usually take the form of man-made facilities designed for audiences beyond just the local community, and include shopping malls, casinos, live theater, tourist districts, farmers' markets, and theme parks.

Educational attractions (Edutainment), which is a growing area of the tourism attractions business, include both natural and man-made attractions whose primary aim is to provide visitors with learning and or enrichment opportunities from a social, business/industrial, cultural, scientific, or historical perspective. The intent is to provide an experience that provides visitors with the opportunity to develop/acquire knowledge, skills, or abilities. Interpretation, from a learning or educational perspective, must be provided either through print material, signs, guides/interpreters, or special programming (i.e., seminars, class-room instruction). Educational attractions include interpretive centers, zoos, scenic tours, theme parks, plant tours, and conservation areas.

The next step in the process is to evaluate and rank attractions, and the FVA incorporates an evaluation and ranking

system for VA in SIDS based on best practice gleaned from the literature and reflected in the following criteria: access in terms of travel time, and availability of reliable public transport or organized tours to the attraction; existing level of use in relation to carrying capacity; uniqueness and distinctiveness characteristics; quality measured by authenticity and representativeness; sustainability as evidenced by conservation measures, authenticity of cultural representations, community identity and employment for local residents, and effective management structures and practices; local level and national importance; and international awareness and recognition (Figure 2).

The ranking of VA is vital for tourism planning purposes, and the development of innovative management strategies. As such, a methodology is proposed which incorporates a scoring method, the results of which can be used to rank VA. Based on the suggested evaluation criteria, a score can be assigned to an attraction depending on the level of satisfaction of the specific criterion on the following scale:

- 0 = *criterion not achieved in any respect;*
- 1 = *low level of achievement of the criterion;*
- 2 = *moderate level of achievement of the criterion;*
- 3 = *high level of achievement of the criterion.*

However, to ensure that the evaluation criteria utilized are balanced, value weights (0-3) are assigned on the relative level of importance of the criteria. In this regard, the criteria that are more related to the intrinsic nature of attractions are given the greatest weight, in particular, the criteria of quality and sustainability are considered as best representing the underlying nature of attractions and deserving of greater emphasis in evaluating the attractions. The remaining four criteria are viewed as more subject to external influences on their value, thus the assignment of the greatest weights on the intrinsic qualities of an attraction will offset any disadvantage that a high-quality feature might experience as a result of the more external influencing factors such as access to and level of use of the attraction.

Based on the scale described in the ranking method and the specific weighted criteria, VA can be ranked by multiplying the level determined on the scale of 0 to 3 by the respective weights. This scoring system goes beyond the assessment of asset importance proposed by Hughey et al. (2004) who scored VA as of low, moderate, or high importance based on naturalness, ecological context, cultural significance, and socioeconomic importance. The scoring system proposed in this article generates a total weighted score that reflects the level of satisfaction of the evaluation criteria which permits the allocation of VA to classes based on total score calculated as follows: Class I (25-36), Class II (13-24), and Class III (0-12). This approach removes some of the subjectivity embedded in the Hughey et al. method.

Class I attractions are the most outstanding attractions, particularly in terms of intrinsic qualities, activity programs, and supporting infrastructural facilities; strong links with

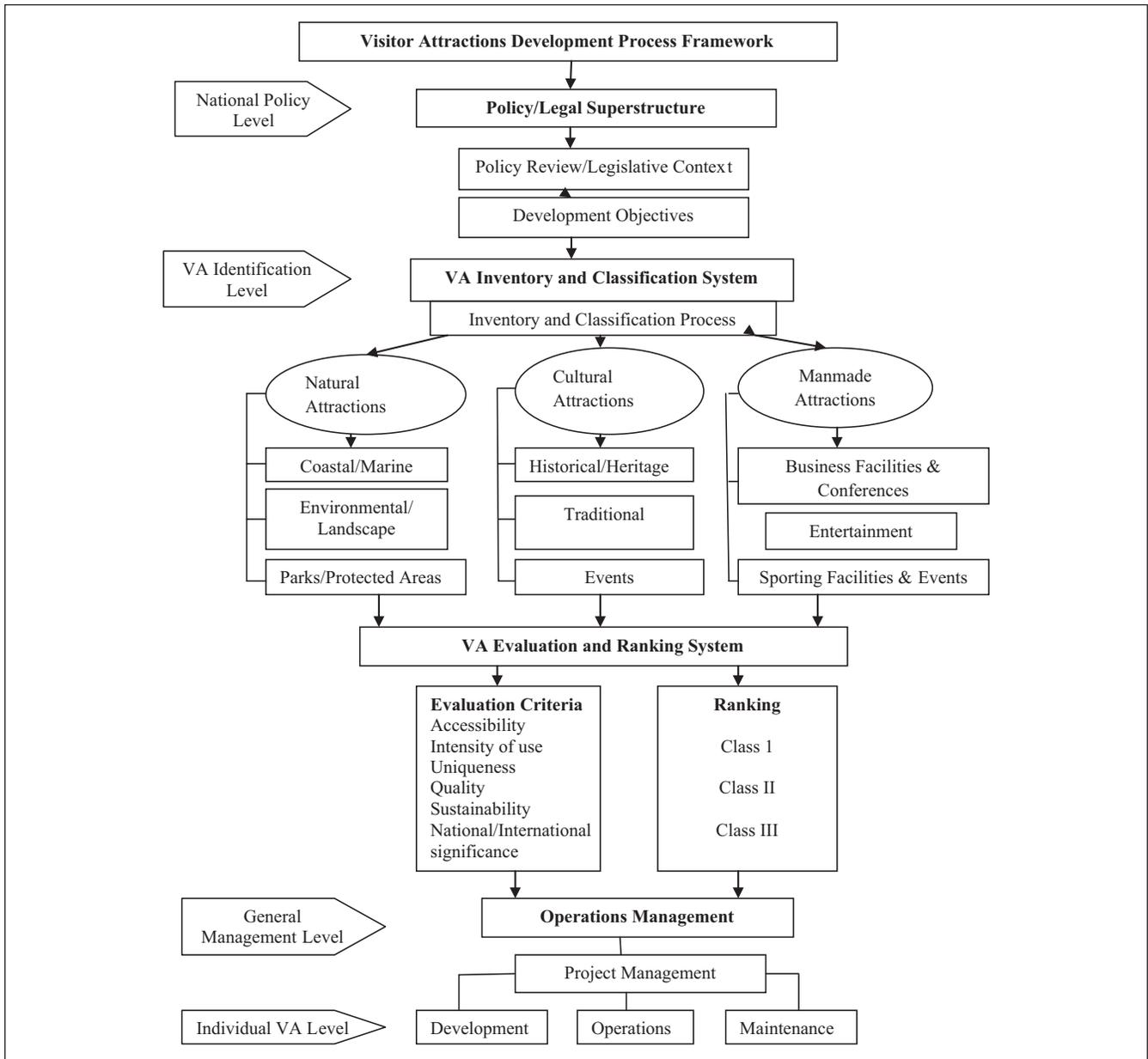


Figure 2. VA development process framework.
 Note. VA = visitor attractions.

other attractions with potential to form clusters of attractions; display of high levels of developmental, environmental, and socioeconomic sustainability; presence of an effective management structure for regular maintenance; and accessibility to induce optimum visitor levels consistent with carrying capacities. Such attractions provide for the best of the visitor experience and constitute the premier attractions in the country and the focal points in the system of visitor sites and attractions.

Class II attractions are high-quality attractions with an appropriate range of activities and facilities that offer development potential, features that are well known nationally and that are environmentally sensitive and community responsive,

and good access attracting visitor levels below carrying capacity, but require improvement in the management practices to optimize visitor use.

Class III attractions are the average type of attractions that are important for the tourism sector and offer basic recreational and educational experiences, and function as stand-alone features catering mainly to a local resident population. Such attractions require improvement in management practices, activity programs, supporting infrastructure, environmental systems, site access, and enhanced marketing and promotion.

Implementing a VA classification, evaluation, and ranking system is crucial for small islands, because of the pervasive

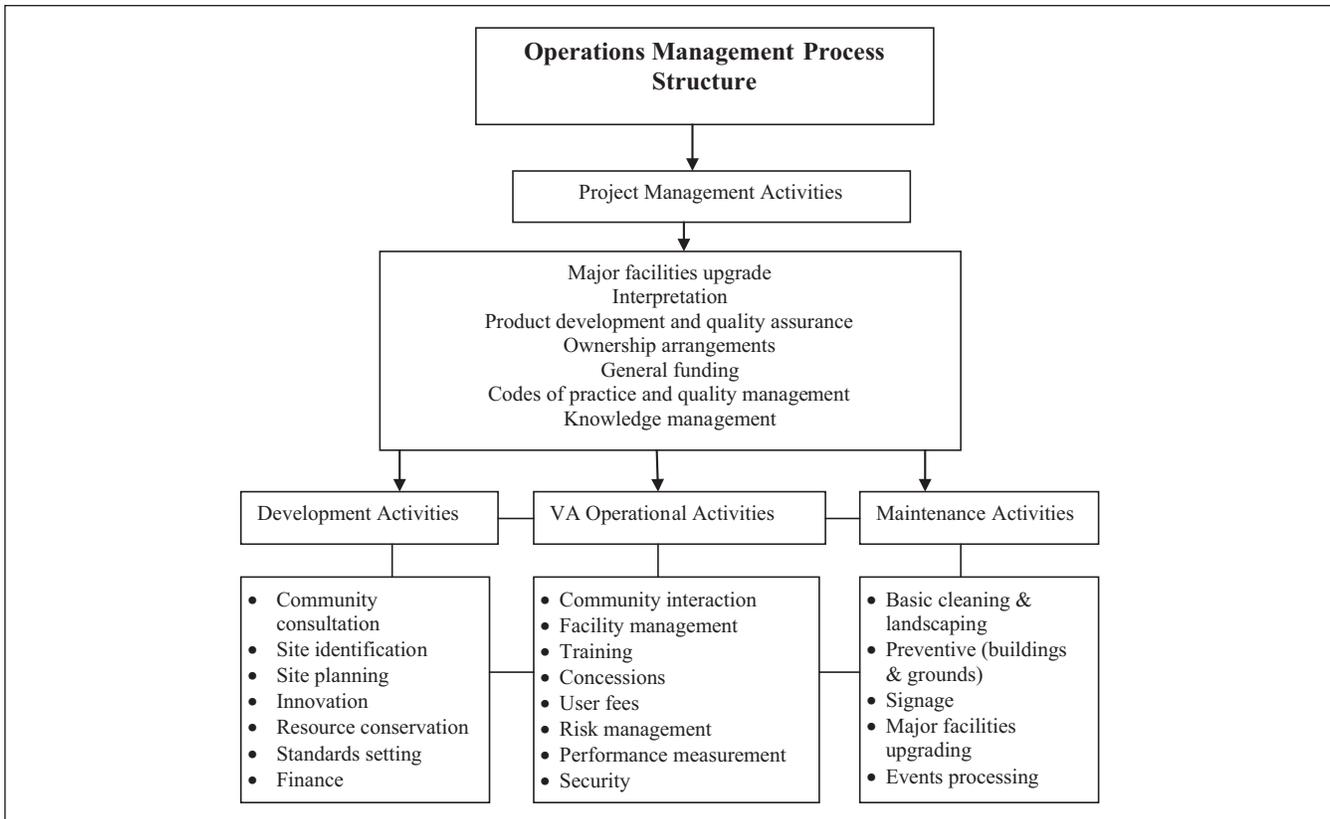


Figure 3. VA operations management process structure.

Note. VA = visitor attractions.

concept of “sun, sand, and sea” as comprising the core attractions to the exclusion of cultural, heritage, and other natural attractions. The system outlined in this article is proposed as significantly easier to implement in small islands where the DMOs are traditionally under-resourced.

Operations Management Process Structure

The operations management process structure (Figure 3) covers the project management level and the critical activities to be implemented at the individual VA sites that are acknowledged as the most deficient areas in SIDS (Harrison et al., 2003; Magaš, 2010). The project management responsibility is considered a central-level function to be carried out by the TDC in Trinidad and the THA in Tobago as the respective DMOs. Magaš detailed the responsibilities of the DMO, which cover co-ordination and cooperation as the main tools of resource management. The objective of the DMO is to create useful partnerships and achieve balanced tourism development on the conviction that consolidation of knowledge, similar capabilities, capital, and other resources, can provide competitive advantage of a destination (Magaš, 2010). Based on the assessment of VA sites from this research, project management activities must focus on

upgrading of major facilities, constructing interpretation centers, pursuing product development, diversifying ownership, securing funding, establishing codes of practice and quality management, and managing the entire framework through adopting a knowledge management approach as proposed by Zehrer (2011).

Operational collaboration can be achieved between public and private agencies by pursuing site-level implementation functions through a combination of public sector agencies, non-governmental organizations, community-based organizations, and public–private partnerships. Implementation actions demand deep collaboration and involvement with the community in development activities, operations management, and maintenance, because these are the critical activities that dictate whether the visitor has a satisfactory experience (Kan et al., 2009; Moyle et al., 2010; Shikida, Yoda, Kino, & Morishige, 2010).

The development of attractions involves attention to several critical areas at the implementation level. Increasingly, the wisdom of involving the community in a consultative process is being recognized, and this practice is particularly relevant to SIDS like TT. A procedure for selecting suitable VA is critical to the development process, which is the precursor to the detailed site planning activity. A vital consideration in the

selection and planning of VA is accessibility as emphasized by Brown and Cave (2010). At the implementation level, the managers of VA are required to mobilize the development finance to ensure a viable product. The development of VA in SIDS is often dependent on financial assistance from governmental agencies which Swarbrooke (2001) argues is necessary for creating a climate within which the attractions sector can flourish.

Operations management covers the routine management of VA such as interacting with the local community as emphasized by Kan et al. (2009) and Harrison et al. (2003), ensuring facilities display acceptable standards, training of staff because “small islandness imposes particular nuances upon the management of human resources” (Baum, 2012, p.124), awarding concessions for support services, devising user fees, managing risk, measuring performance, and ensuring adequate security of visitors. Creating user-friendly operational management systems that enhance the visitor experience is a big challenge, but these help to remove obstacles to visitor enjoyment. Thus, operations management is in many ways the key to customer satisfaction and optimizing financial performance. Operations management as the small island level must focus in the future on effective management of attractions which Leask (2010) argues is not based on numbers of visitors, but engagement with stakeholders and employment of management practices appropriate to the site, resource, and the visitors.

Maintenance responsibilities encompass basic cleaning and landscaping, preventive building care, establishing plant nurseries, major construction and upgrading, and processing of events. The dynamic integration of these components at the operational level is what will determine the success of the FVA in achieving effective management of attractions, and is consistent with the themes identified in the literature and elaborated in this article (Carlsen, 1999; Kan et al., 2009; Kirovska, 2011; Lu & Nepal, 2009; Meriläinen & Lemmetyinen, 2011; Swarbrooke, 2002; Watson, McCracken, & Hughes, 2004). A high standard of maintenance must be a requirement for including any site or attraction in local and international promotional efforts (Figure 2).

Results Verification

To verify the originality and functionality of the results of this study, the proposed framework was submitted by email to a review panel of Caribbean and international experts. The expert panel comprised academics and practitioners in the field of tourism, who were identified based on the researcher’s knowledge of influential persons in the Caribbean environment, and authors of the journal articles covered in the literature review related to VA management.

The experts reflect a wide range of involvement and expertise in tourism studies and operations, and experiences garnered from varied locations in the world. The comments of 14 experts, 6 of whom are Caribbean based and 8 internationally based, were received, checked, and assessed by the

researcher for relevance, and where applicable, the comments were incorporated into the framework design.

To verify the applicability of the results to the Tobago case study, the researcher presented the final FVA to a group of Tobago stakeholders at a seminar hosted by the Tobago Hospitality and Tourism Institute (THTI). The participants in the seminar comprised students of tourism, board members and faculty of the THTI, senior representatives of the Division of Tourism and the Division of Finance and Enterprise Development of the THA, and tourism industry operators and stakeholders. An immediate follow-up session focusing on the operations management processes was conducted by the researcher with the faculty of the THTI, board members, and managers of the Division of Tourism. The general consensus was that the FVA was highly applicable to the Tobago situation and implementation of the structure will be tested.

Limitations of the Study

The study focused on the destination supply side by looking at visitor sites and attractions, and did not treat in-depth with the demand side of what encourages tourists to travel to a destination, nor the areas of visitor experiences. The study, therefore, is limited to the extent that foreign visitors were not interviewed for views on their experiences. In qualitative research, repeat interviews are considered important to the validity of the findings. Such repeat interviews could not be arranged at mutually satisfactory times and would have incurred significant additional cost. The findings are limited in this respect, although the researcher is confident that the findings would not have required significant amendments. The final limitation is that the proposed system was not tested with the sites and attractions developers and managers to gain an insight into the potential workings of the system. This limitation can be overcome by future action research, the opportunity for which is likely to arise in Tobago.

Concluding Remarks

The literature on island tourism pointed to a gap regarding the management of VA in the studies of the Latin American region to which TT belongs. Several models, systems, and frameworks were explored, but the models tended to focus on specific elements, such as destination management and collaborative systems, rather than an integrated model. d’Angella et al. (2010) identified four models, but indicated that the fragmented model was the most common and suggested a model should be devised to achieve operational balance, although they did not detail such a model. The major finding of the study was that an observable deficiency exists in the overall structure for developing and managing the relatively wide range of existing VA in TT, and the distinct need was the formulation of a simple operational framework within which the development and management components can be rationalized and systematized. The framework presented in

this article is an attempt to formulate such a simple framework which is represented as a process that, if implemented, will constitute a major advance in the coordinated management of VA in SIDS. This position was confirmed through feedback on the proposed framework received on its presentation to a stakeholder seminar comprising mainly tourism sector practitioners which was convened at the THTI for the expressed purpose of testing the applicability of the FVA to Tobago.

The VA component of the tourism complex in small islands constitutes the core of the product offerings, and DMOs need to recognize that tourism sustainability demands that a framework or system is created within which the professional development and management of such attractions can take place. Because of the vulnerability of tourism in small islands, the managerial focus is inescapable if such islands are to become competitive in an increasingly dynamic industry. As stated by Ritchie et al. (2011), a new management paradigm emerged, which focuses on mass customization of visitor experience design and delivery. Ritchie et al. argued that a “first step in developing such a management paradigm is to assist managers to fully understand the nature of the tourism experience in all its forms and at all levels” (p. 420).

The FVA proposed in this article is both innovative and value adding to both academic researchers and tourism industry practitioners in that it reflects a multidimensional approach which incorporates the key system components as opposed to the uni-dimensional approach lamented by Anuar et al. (2012), Moyle et al. (2010), Lebe and Milfelner (2006), and Carlsen (1999), a rationalization and integration of the various models which seek to classify and categorize sites and attractions and place them into classes, the development of an easily applied evaluation and ranking system appropriate to SIDS, and a framework clearly locating the responsibilities for the policy and legal dimensions, planning, categorization, and evaluation at the organizational level, and an operations management framework for project management and implementation of development activities, operations, and maintenance. Future research should be conducted to assess the results of implementing the FVA.

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